



from Protest to Engagement



**Habib Ali al-Jifri on
'From Protest to Engagement'**

Al-salām ‘alaykum wa rahmat Allah wa ta’āla wa barakātuhu

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, all praise be to Allah. The title of the programme is ‘From Protest to Engagement’ and as Muslims we’re people of practice, people of action. I would like to start by saying Shaykh AbdAllah bin Bayyah who we just heard speak to you today is a man who spent his entire life serving this faith. He is a man who has gone past 60 and is going into his 70’s and has worked tirelessly to serve this faith. He is a man who was injured in his hotel in the days that he has been here, so he has congealed blood on his finger and high blood pressure, and yet he carried himself at his age, in order to speak to you today. We were travelling on a train and the train was stopped; we had to transfer to another train in order to get here, but he still came. If the entire thing was just to do a job and be finished then Shaykh AbdAllah in his years of service has already done more than his job. But the thing that brought him here is that he is here to serve his faith and because of his relation to his Creator; he wants to serve his faith, and not for any political reason, he is here today.

Before I start what I would like to do is give you some action points and I’d like one of the volunteers to stand here in front. I want ten people to go to this person at the end of our talk in order to volunteer themselves and clear up the mess that we made before we leave this hall. Sorry, I want 9 people because I am the 10th person [members of the Audience give praise]. And I tell you, doing that is an act of worship in itself by which we are drawn nearer to God. We have no time to suck up to anyone, or to try and impress anyone; this is to do with our faith. The Prophet (saw) said *‘It is an act of worship to remove an obstacle from someone’s way.’*

We’re a nation who the Prophet (saw) enjoined and told them it’s an act of charity in itself to remove obstacles in another’s way. So we should be content in ourselves leaving a place and leaving obstacles behind us. It’s an act of charity for us to remove obstacles. Just quickly I would like to talk about why we are speaking at this time about engagement. And why is it that we want to leave protest. What we mean by leaving protest is that we shouldn’t make our work exclusively protest. Yes, when we see something is wrong, we should protest that something is wrong but we shouldn’t overstep the boundary and we should always keep the courtesy of the Prophet of Allah (saw); we should always maintain the character of the Prophet of Allah, even when we protest.

What we want to say is that the person who lives his relationship with other people as a relationship that is only based on protest is someone who has no message to carry to people. The one who looks and sees that he should engage with others, is a person who has something to say, or has a message to take to other people.

The Qur’ān says ‘Oh People of the Book, come to us and come to a word upon which we are both equal’ – this is a process that involves engagement. This is to the Muslim, the non-Muslim, the believer, the atheist, it’s to bring them so that we engage with each other in order to bring something good to them and to bring something good to all of us.

The Prophet (saw) said that if he was called to a treaty made in the days of *jāhiliyyah*, called the *Treaty of Fadūl*, if he was asked after his Prophecy to come to this treaty, this agreement as one of the signatories to it, then he said *‘I would have come and been a signatory to this Treaty.’* Why? Because this was a treaty to remove injustices, so he’s saying that even after Islām, if they were to call him to this treaty again, even if those people were idolaters, he would come to that Treaty and join them and be one of their signatories.

Every society has certain individuals within it whose only job is to cause dissension and to cause corruption and to bring trouble, in order for them to reach whatever objectives they need to reach. Shaykh AbdAllah bin Bayyah in his talk yesterday reminded us of one of the things narrated by the Companions of the Prophet (saw) in which he said an analogy: it's as if there are two people on a ship, some of them in the deck and some of them in the hull, and the people on the deck say they want to get some water, and the quickest way to get some water – they tell themselves- is to drill a hole in the hull and we can get to the source of water; by doing so, they will drown and everyone else will drown. The Shaykh reminded us that the people who hold back the people who want to drill a hole in the ship, will save not only themselves but the people about to drown us by drilling a hole in the ship. The Prophet of Allah said in this hadīth that the people who hold back those who are about to drill a hole in the ship and cause it to sink, will save everyone on that ship. Their stopping it is not only to save themselves, but to also save everyone else.

And yes, there are people here who try to cause dissension, cause corruption and tell everyone else in the societies that they should look at the Muslims as criminals. But you'll find more of those in countries other than Britain – those people are not in the majority. You'll find more of them in other countries outside. Also amongst the Muslims there are people of corruption who also tell the Muslims to look at everyone else in the same way; that they're enemies. There are some of them who have said 'I live here as though this place is my toilet, I'll do whatever I need and then I'll leave this toilet.' I've said to people like this before that no self-respecting man would live in a toilet for ten years or even twenty years. And if he does live in a toilet, he'll get out of a toilet and leave it clean behind him, and if you see these lands truly as toilets, then there is so much filth inside you that you really need to clean up. Shaykh AbdAllah said that the land is the land of God, and the people in it are the servants of God, and a servant of God should look at the other servants of God with the eye of mercy, extending goodness towards them and looking at them with compassion, and wanting compassion to come to them.

So a person who looks at creation with an eye of compassion can understand why the Prophet (saw) started weeping when he saw the procession of a man who was part of a faith other than Islām; died in a state other than a state of submission to God. The Prophet wept and wept and the Companions said to him *'why do you weep over him and he is not even a believer.'* The Prophet (saw) said, *'didn't he have a soul that I couldn't save from going to hell?'*

A person who lives that state where his heart can weep because he sees that he is unable to let the Truth reach some people, is a person with whom Allah will be pleased to let be this person serve the Truth and reach peoples' hearts; because this vocation is the vocation of the Prophets of God – it's not the vocation of other men. And the others who do it are doing it on behalf of the Prophets of God – as representatives of the Prophet of God.

I would like to conclude with three action points, action points which will raise our state of consciousness; action points to do with how we should be inside as a community, how we should deal with ourselves and each other within, and then three action points on how we should extend this to those around us – to everything around us, and to everyone around us, because if we don't have the first three action points, we won't have the other three. The first action point is that we need to have understanding of our religion. By understanding our religion we need to devote ourselves and the totality of our being, to really studying and pondering the life of the Prophet of God (saw). We need to go and take our knowledge from scholars because whoever thinks we can take our knowledge straight from a book is deluding himself. We need to take our knowledge from our scholars because by doing this, this is the only way to become firmly established in understanding. We need to take knowledge from scholars who have an unbroken chain going back all the way to the Prophet of God. We need to take this from scholars whose chain starts with them and ends with the

Prophet of God (saw) – a chain that goes back to the Prophet of God with regard to the chain of narrations in what pertains to the understanding of the sacred text, and what pertains to the purification of the self in order to live that sacred text.

Then we need people amongst the community who will give their lives from each city, from each locale who will devote their lives to the acquisition of knowledge; who will go to Al-Azhar in Egypt, who will go to the Sham, go to Haudramaut, go to Shaykh AbdAllah bin Bayyah in order to devote themselves and give their lives to this faith and come back to this community, come back to this land as people from this land, coming back to serve the people of this land. Those of us who can't devote our lives to the acquisition of knowledge because of other commitments, should devote some of their time to dīn-intensive courses in order to learn and come back and learn how to practice, how to live it and how to take it back to people practically and engage with it practically.

The thing about the people who will devote their lives to the acquisition of knowledge, by going to the places of knowledge, is that they have to distinguish between two things – the acquisition of knowledge and how they saw it being implemented in the lands that they took it from, and the knowledge that they bring back here and how to implement it in this land – in a different context.

People like Shaykh Abdul Hakim Winters already have the experience because they've travelled, they've taken the knowledge, come back here and they've learnt how to implement it in the context here. Those of you who are honest, will go and sit with people like him and have the patience to sit with people like him after their acquisition of knowledge, in order to understand from people like him, how to implement the knowledge you have come back with.

The second point is to have steadfastness in implementing this knowledge; to act upon this knowledge in your private moments, in your house, in the moments when your anger gets the better of you or wants to get the better of you, in the moments where your lower passions want to get the better of you, in the moment when your greed is engaged, in those moments, if the light of the knowledge you carry doesn't come forward and teach you and guide you as to how to act, then how can you benefit anyone else with this knowledge? And how you do this is by having steadfastness; by implementing that which you learn. If we have just heard today that removing obstacles from someone's way is charity (the Prophet saw said), one of us should take this on board and understand that one of us shouldn't think about throwing something outside of the window unless there's a policeman there who's going to find them. Rather none of us should throw something out of the car window, because even to clear obstacles that people have thrown, is an act of charity for us, and through which we are drawn nearer to God. So how could we allow ourselves to even throw something?

By understanding this we should know that this isn't a form of belittlement or an abasement for us. Some people might leave this talk and think 'this Shaykh wants us to be the street cleaners of Britain'. What you have to understand is the one who gives charity is the one who has to the one who has not, so it's a position of strength in charity. This in itself, to bend down and pick something up, is an act of strength. The one who wouldn't be happy to see a piece of dirt thrown on the ground and will pick it up, will be someone in whose heart Allah will place a secret which is the understanding of how to remove the obstacles that are in peoples' hearts.

The third point is to have objective self-criticism. Self-criticism is something natural to the human being and something which the Qur'ān stipulates or encourages. The Qur'ān narrates the story of the wife of Ta'zīz of Egypt, when she said 'I do not claim myself as innocent. Truly the self commands to evil, except the self that has been shown mercy by God.' So we should have an ability to have self-criticism. We should like it when people show us the

wrongs in our own selves. Seyyidnā ‘Omar said ‘May Allah show mercy to a person who gives me the gift of showing me my own wrongs.’ He called it a gift for someone to be able to show him the wrongs in himself. And Imam Al-Ghazālī said, these subtleties of bad character are like a scorpion that has entered ones pocket; a scorpion may sting you and poison the body but the scorpion we’re talking about is the scorpion of bad character, a scorpion that can poison the heart.

After these three things, let everyone know what Islām is – the teachings of your faith, let everyone know what they are. If someone was to come today and speak about Ghandi saying that he was a terrorist, people would say no he wasn’t. Why? Because people know who Ghandi was. People have made Ghandi known to everyone. And we need to do this with the Prophet (saw) but even before this. The other thing is, how will we make the Prophet (saw) known to people? By our knowledge, our implementation of knowledge and how we treat others.

We also need to engage with these societies in harmony with the teachings of our faith; societies have problems and challenges we need to help this society we’re in; this society is suffering as a whole – including us and everyone in this society. We have problems with drugs, teenage abortion, insomnia, problems of depression, breakdown of families, we need to contribute and help these social societies; we have something to give to these societies.

The third point which Shaykh AbdAllah bin Bayyah spoke about yesterday in which he mentioned the analogy of the ship. We’re not just talking about Muslims and that some Muslims are corrupting the people in the ship and drilling a hole in the ship of Islām, we’re talking about the ship of this whole society. We have to understand that there are people of sagacity, people of understanding in this society, and we have to say to each other, let’s take each other by the hand and help each other. There are people in the hull of the ship – Muslims and non-Muslims- who are about to sink the whole ship, and we’re all about to sink in it together.

So when we see someone speaking badly about somebody or a minority or people in the society, we shouldn’t say, ‘he’s speaking badly about us’ – we should say ‘look at this person, he is trying to destroy the value of equality, on which the society is based. He’s not attacking us; he’s attacking the society as a whole.

There are two things I would like for us: that when we come to these lectures and conferences, that I see a pen and paper in the hands of people and let them write the points that are beneficial for them. What Shaykh Abdallah talked about today was a methodology, a curriculum with which we can engage with the society around us. I would like to see everyone with a pen and paper and write down the things of benefit they hear from these talks.

The second thing I would like is for everyone to go away from here and say this every day: *subhān Allāhi wa bihamdihi* one hundred times every day. The Prophet (saw) said that *‘whoever makes this remembrance one hundred times every day, Allah will forgive every sin they had, even if his sins were as numerous as the foam left by the waves.’*

As a final remark I would like the brothers and sisters to leave this place with serenity and quiet. Leave this place with serenity and when they talk to each other, talk to each other in a low voice. Leave this place that is all well mannered, organised in a way that is orderly. God, *subhāna wa ta’āla*, commanded us to pray in uniform lines, so we should be orderly and organised.

I would also like the nine people to come forward and I will join them, and we can go to the managers of this place and say ‘we made a mess of certain places do you give us permission, in order to clean them up?’ If they give us permission, all is good, otherwise we have done

our duty. We have all agreed on this, please come forward and give your names to this person.

Bārīk Allāh fīkum

[Closing du'a and Al-Fātiha]

About Habib Ali al-Jifri

Habib 'Ali Zain Al Abideen Al Jifri was born into a family of noble lineage extending in an unbroken chain to Imam Husayn (ra), the grandson of the Prophet (saw). Habib 'Ali is from the majestic city of Tarim, South Yemen. Nestled in the ancient valley of Hadramawt, Tarim has been a center of learning and spirituality for centuries. Habib 'Ali received a classical Islamic education from the illustrious scholars of Hadramawt, embodying a methodology which crystallizes the middle way of Islam, Islamic Jurisprudence, a respect for the differences between jurists and a spiritual education drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Habib 'Ali is Founder of the 'Taba Foundation for Islamic Studies and Research' based in the United Arab Emirates. He is also a lecturer at Dar Al Mustafa, Tarim, an educational institute established for the study of traditional Islamic sciences. Habib 'Ali is continually invited to lecture in many countries across the globe and appears regularly on a variety network television and radio programs.

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